

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of

Implementation of the Non-Accounting
Safeguards of Sections 271 and 272 of the
Communications Act of 1934, as Amended

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CC Docket No. 96-149

Second Order on Reconsideration

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By the Commission:

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I. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

1. In the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, released on December 24, 1996, the Commission implemented the non-accounting safeguards provisions of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996

(Communications Act).¹ These provisions generally prescribe the manner in which the Bell Operating Companies (BOCs) may enter certain new markets, including the in-region interLATA services market.² In this *Second Order on Reconsideration*, we examine in greater depth the proper interpretation of one of these provisions, section 272(e)(4).

2. The BOCs' interpretation -- that section 272(e)(4) is an affirmative grant of authority allowing a BOC to provide directly (*i.e.*, not through a separate affiliate) in-region interLATA services on a wholesale basis -- presents an apparent conflict with section 272(a), which, in relevant part, *prohibits* a BOC from doing precisely this. Such conflict is only heightened by the requirement in section 272(b)(1) that a BOC and its separate affiliate must "operate independently," which, as explained below, presupposes that the BOC may not provide any in-region interLATA services directly.

3. Confronting this apparent conflict, we conclude that our original interpretation -- that section 272(e)(4) imposes requirements on BOC provision of interLATA services that the BOCs are otherwise authorized to provide -- is the only one that resolves the conflict in a way that squares with the considered policy choice Congress made in imposing a separate affiliate requirement for BOC provision of in-region interLATA services. In the past, where courts and agencies have chosen to impose separate affiliate requirements on the BOCs for competitive services requiring local BOC facilities as an input, the defining feature of such requirements has always been a prohibition on providing such services on an end-to-end physically integrated basis, and for an obvious reason. It is precisely the provision of such

¹ See *Implementation of the Non-Accounting Safeguards of Sections 271 and 272 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended*, CC Docket No. 96-149, First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 96-489 (rel. Dec. 24, 1996) (*Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*), on recon., FCC 97-52 (rel. Feb. 19, 1997), recon. pending, petition for summary review in part denied and motion for voluntary remand granted sub nom., *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, No. 97-1067 (D.C. Cir. filed Mar. 31, 1997), petition for review pending sub nom., *SBC Communications v. FCC*, No. 97-1118 (D.C. Cir. filed Mar. 6, 1997) (held in abeyance pursuant to court order filed May 7, 1997).

² See *id.* para. 4. An interLATA service is statutorily defined as "telecommunications between a point located in a local access and transport area [*i.e.*, in a LATA] and a point located outside such [LATA]." 47 U.S.C. § 153(21). A LATA, in turn, is statutorily defined as a "contiguous geographic area (A) established before the date of enactment of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 by a [BOC] . . . or (B) established or modified by a [BOC] after such date of enactment and approved by the Commission." *Id.* § 153(25). LATAs were created as part of the Modification of Final Judgment's (MFJ) plan of reorganization under which the BOCs were divested from AT&T. See *United States v. Western Elec. Co.*, 552 F. Supp. 131 (D.D.C. 1982), *aff'd sub nom. Maryland v. United States*, 460 U.S. 1001 (1983); *United States v. Western Elec. Co.*, 569 F. Supp. 1057 (D.D.C. 1983) (plan of reorganization), *aff'd sub nom. California v. United States*, 464 U.S. 1013 (1983). Among other things, the MFJ prohibited the BOCs from providing certain services, such as interLATA telecommunications and information services. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 vacated the MFJ on a going-forward basis. See *United States v. Western Elec. Co.*, No. 82-0192 (D.D.C. Apr. 11, 1996). Lastly, an *in-region* interLATA service provided by a BOC is an interLATA service "originating in any of [that BOC's] in-region States," 47 U.S.C. § 271(b)(1), which is any state in which the BOC "was authorized to provide wireline telephone exchange service pursuant to the reorganization plan," *id.* § 271(i)(1).

services on an end-to-end physically integrated basis that gives rise to the concerns that separate affiliate requirements are intended to address. Our original interpretation of section 272(e)(4) preserves this essential prohibition, while the BOCs' interpretation, under which section 272(e)(4) is a grant of authority, eviscerates it. Our interpretation is bolstered by our view that it is exceedingly unlikely that Congress would have tucked away a fundamental grant of authority in section 272(e), which imposes obligations on the BOCs in response to requests from unaffiliated carriers. The thrust of section 272 is likewise to limit, not expand, BOC authority.

II. STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

4. BOC entry into the in-region interLATA services market is governed by sections 271 and 272 of the Communications Act. Section 271(a) states that neither a BOC nor an affiliate "may provide interLATA services except as provided in this section."³ Section 271(b) grants immediate authorization to a BOC or its affiliate to provide interLATA services originating outside of the BOC's in-region states ("out-of-region" interLATA services) and to provide six specified "incidental" interLATA services.⁴ Section 271(f) explains that the prohibition in section 271(a) does not apply to any activities "previously authorized" by the court that administered the AT&T Consent Decree.⁵

5. With respect to interLATA services originating within a BOC's in-region states ("in-region" interLATA services), 271(b) does not authorize immediate entry. Specifically, section 271(b)(1) states that a BOC or its affiliate may provide in-region interLATA services originating in a particular state if, and only if, the Commission formally approves the provision of such services pursuant to section 271(d)(3).⁶ Section 271(d)(3) approval for a particular state is generally designed to ensure that the BOC has taken sufficient steps to open its local exchange network in that state to competition.⁷ As explained in the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, Congress recognized that section 271(d)(3) approval might be granted in a particular state before the local exchange market in that state became fully competitive.⁸ Congress thus enacted section 272 to respond to the concerns about anticompetitive discrimination and cost-shifting that arise when a BOC enters the interLATA

³ *Id.* § 271(a).

⁴ *Id.* § 271(b)(2) (out-of-region interLATA services); *id.* § 271(b)(3) (incidental interLATA services).

⁵ *Id.* § 271(f). As amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the Communications Act defines "AT&T Consent Decree" to refer to the MFJ and all subsequent judgments or orders related to the MFJ. *Id.* § 153(3).

⁶ *See id.* § 271(b)(1).

⁷ *See id.* § 271(d)(3)(A) (generally requiring a facilities-based competitor and satisfaction of a competitive checklist).

⁸ *See Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, para. 9.

services market in an in-region state in which the local exchange market is not yet fully competitive.⁹ As reflected in the title of section 272 ("Separate Affiliate; Safeguards"), Congress chose to respond to these concerns through the structural requirement of a separate affiliate. Thus, section 272(a)(1) provides that "[a] Bell operating company (including any affiliate) . . . may not provide any service described in [section 272(a)(2)] unless it provides that service through one or more [separate] affiliates" that operate independently of the BOC.¹⁰

6. Section 272(a)(2) lists three kinds of services for which a separate affiliate is required: (a) manufacturing services, (b) "[o]rigination of interLATA telecommunications services" other than out-of-region services, previously authorized services, and all but one of the six incidental services,¹¹ and (c) "[i]nterLATA information services" other than electronic publishing services and alarm monitoring services.¹² Thus, section 272(a)(2) requires a separate affiliate for the origination of all but three kinds of interLATA telecommunications services (out-of-region services, previously authorized services, and most incidental services) and all but two kinds of interLATA information services (electronic publishing services and alarm monitoring services).

7. As a general matter, the other provisions in section 272 define more precisely how structurally separate the BOC and its section 272 interLATA affiliate must be, and the terms of any relationship between the two. With regards to structural separation, the most significant provisions in section 272 are section 272(b)(1), which requires the separate affiliate to "operate independently from the [BOC],"¹³ section 272(b)(2), which requires it to keep "separate" books of account,¹⁴ and section 272(b)(3), which requires it to have "separate officers, directors, and employees."¹⁵ With regard to the relationship between the BOC and its structurally separate affiliate, the most significant provisions are section 272(b)(5), which requires that any dealings between the two be conducted "on an arm's length basis," "reduced

⁹ See *id.*

¹⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 272(a)(1).

¹¹ The one incidental service for which a separate affiliate is required is described in section 272(g)(4). See *id.* § 271(g)(4) (describing incidental service that permits a customer located in one LATA to retrieve stored information from, or file information for storage in, information storage facilities of a BOC or its affiliate that are located in another LATA).

¹² *Id.* § 272(a)(2). Electronic publishing has its own distinct structural separation requirements. See *id.* § 274.

¹³ *Id.* § 272(b)(1).

¹⁴ *Id.* § 272(b)(2).

¹⁵ *Id.* § 272(b)(3).

to writing," and made "available for public inspection,"¹⁶ and section 272(c)(1), which provides that in such dealings, a BOC "may not discriminate between [the BOC] or affiliate and any other entity in the provision or procurement of goods, services, facilities, and information, or in the establishment of standards."¹⁷

8. Section 272(e), which is entitled "Fulfillment of Certain Requests," contains four provisions, three of which impose particularized non-discrimination requirements pertaining to direct BOC provision of telephone exchange service and exchange access. Specifically, section 272(e)(1) states that a BOC "shall fulfill any requests from an unaffiliated entity for telephone exchange service and exchange access within a period no longer than the period in which it provides such telephone exchange service and exchange access to itself or to its affiliates";¹⁸ section 272(e)(2) states that a BOC "shall not provide any facilities, services, or information concerning its provision of exchange access to [an] affiliate . . . unless such facilities, services, or information are made available to other providers of interLATA services in that market on the same terms and conditions";¹⁹ and section 272(e)(3) states that a BOC "shall charge the affiliate . . . , or impute to itself (if using the access for its provision of its own services), an amount for access to its telephone exchange service and exchange access that is no less than the amount charged to any unaffiliated interexchange carriers for such service."²⁰ The fourth subsection, section 272(e)(4), is the subject of this order. As the Joint Explanatory Statement describes them, these provisions are "[a]dditional requirements for the provision of interLATA services" that are "intended to reduce litigation by establishing in advance the standard to which a BOC entity that provides telephone exchange service or exchange access service must comply in providing interconnection to an unaffiliated entity."²¹

9. The final provision in the statutory framework governing BOC entry that bears mention is section 272(f), which provides, among other things, for the sunset of the separate affiliate requirement in section 272(a). With respect to "interLATA telecommunications

¹⁶ *Id.* § 272(b)(5).

¹⁷ *Id.* § 272(c)(1).

¹⁸ *Id.* § 272(e)(1).

¹⁹ *Id.* § 272(e)(2).

²⁰ *Id.* § 272(e)(3).

²¹ Joint Statement of Managers, S. Conf. Rep. No. 104-230, 104th Cong., 2d Sess. 150 (1996) (Joint Explanatory Statement). This explanation appears in the discussion in the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Senate version of what is now section 272(e), which was the version that contained what is now section 272(e)(4). The Joint Explanatory Statement is silent on the House version of section 272(e), which in any event did not contain any provision akin to what is now section 272(e)(4). The Joint Explanatory Statement is also silent on the final version of section 272(e), which, as just noted, adopted section 272(e)(4) as it appeared in the Senate version of section 272(e).

services" in particular, 272(f) provides for sunset three years after grant of section 271(d)(3) approval, unless the Commission extends the three-year period by rule or order.²² For interLATA information services, the sunset period is four years after enactment of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 unless extended by rule or order.

10. In the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, we implemented these and other provisions of section 272. In so doing, we explained that the structural and nondiscrimination requirements taken together were intended by Congress to effectuate the goal of preventing anticompetitive abuses by BOCs that control essential local facilities and seek to enter competitive markets that require these facilities as an input.²³ More generally, we explained that:

[o]ur task is to implement section 272 in a manner that ensures that the fundamental goal of the 1996 Act is attained -- to open all telecommunications markets to robust competition -- but at the same time does not impose requirements on the BOCs that will unfairly handicap them in their ability to compete. The rules and policies adopted in this order seek to preserve the carefully crafted statutory balance to the extent possible until facilities-based alternatives to the local exchange and exchange access services of the BOCs make those safeguards no longer necessary.²⁴

11. Of particular significance in the present context is the Commission's implementation of the "operate independently" requirement in section 272(b)(1). As discussed below, the Commission's implementation of the "operate independently" requirement is significant because while not in dispute in the instant proceeding,²⁵ the fundamental policy issue that implementation addressed -- the degree of permissible physical integration between the BOC's local network and the separate affiliate's interLATA network where the affiliate chooses to have such a network²⁶ -- overlaps considerably with the fundamental policy issue raised by the BOCs' proposed reading of section 272(e)(4), namely whether the BOC may

²² 47 U.S.C. § 272(f)(1).

²³ See *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order* at paras. 13, 16.

²⁴ *Id.* at para. 13.

²⁵ We note, however, that the Commission's interpretation of the "operate independently" requirement has been challenged in petitions for reconsideration. See, e.g., AT&T Petition at 4 (filed Feb. 20, 1997) (arguing that the Commission's interpretation is too narrow); MCI Petition at 9 (filed Feb. 20, 1997) (same); BellSouth Petition at 6 (filed Feb. 20, 1997) (arguing that the requirement is self-executing); Ameritech Comments at 2-3 (filed April 2, 1997) (stating that the Commission should affirm its current interpretation).

²⁶ Of course, nothing in the law obligates the separate affiliate to own and operate its own interLATA network. The affiliate may prefer instead to purchase interLATA services wholesale from unaffiliated, facilities-based interLATA service providers.

own and operate an interLATA network within the local operating company itself and thus provide interLATA services on a wholly integrated basis.

12. In the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, we concluded that the "operate independently" requirement entails four important restrictions: (1) no joint BOC-affiliate ownership of switching and transmission facilities, (2) no joint ownership of the land and buildings on which such facilities are located, (3) no provision of operation, installation, or maintenance services by the BOC (or non-section 272 affiliate) with regards to the section 272 affiliate's facilities, and (4) no provision by the section 272 affiliate of operation, installation, or maintenance services with respect to the BOC's facilities.²⁷ We determined that these restrictions are necessary to prevent the "substantial integration" of the BOC's local network and the affiliate's interLATA network where the affiliate chooses to have such a network.²⁸ Such integration, we concluded, is the antithesis of genuine independent operation, for it creates the very dangers of discrimination and improper cost allocation that section 272 was designed to prevent. With respect to the possibility of discrimination, we explained that the non-discrimination requirements in sections 272(b)(5) and 272(c)(1) and elsewhere "would offer little protection if a BOC and its section 272 affiliate were permitted to own transmission and switching facilities jointly."²⁹ For example, "[t]o the extent that a section 272 affiliate jointly owned transmission and switching facilities with a BOC, the affiliate would not have to contract with the BOC to obtain such facilities, thereby precluding a comparison of the terms of transactions between a BOC and a section 272 affiliate with the terms of transactions between a BOC and a competitor of the section 272 affiliate." Together, then, "the prohibition on joint ownership . . . and the nondiscrimination requirements should ensure that competitors can obtain access to transmission and switching facilities equivalent to that which section 272 affiliates receive."³⁰ With respect to the possibility of improper cost allocation, we explained that, "[b]ecause the costs of wired telephony networks and network premises are largely fixed and largely shared among local, access, and other services, sharing of switching and transmission facilities may provide a significant opportunity for improper allocation of costs between the BOC and its section 272 affiliate."³¹ The specific concern with improper cost allocation in this context is that an undue proportion of these shared costs will be allocated to a BOC's local operations, which has two negative effects. First, assuming that the BOC is subject to a regulatory regime that links the local rates it can charge to its costs and that the local market is not fully competitive, such overallocation of costs would allow the BOC to overcharge its local ratepayers by providing local service at a high price

²⁷ See *id.* at para. 158, 163.

²⁸ *Id.* at para. 159.

²⁹ *Id.* at para. 160.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.* at para. 159.

that overestimates the true costs of that service. Second, an overallocation of costs to the BOC's local operations means an underallocation of costs to the affiliate's long-distance operations, which would allow the affiliate to undercut inefficiently its interexchange competitors by providing a long-distance service at a low price that underestimates the true costs of that service.

III. BACKGROUND AND POSITIONS OF THE PARTIES

13. Section 272(e)(4) states that a BOC "may provide any interLATA or intraLATA facilities or services to its interLATA affiliate if such services or facilities are made available to all carriers at the same rates and on the same terms and conditions, and so long as the costs are appropriately allocated."³² In the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, the Commission rejected arguments that section 272(e)(4) is an affirmative grant of authority for BOCs to provide directly interLATA services on a wholesale basis, including in-region services.³³ Rather, the Commission read section 272(e)(4) as a limitation of authority, that is, as imposing a non-discrimination and cost-allocation requirement on the provision of any interLATA or intraLATA facilities or services *that the BOC is otherwise authorized to provide*.³⁴

14. On February 11, 1997, Bell Atlantic and PacTel sought summary reversal of the Commission's interpretation of section 272(e)(4) in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.³⁵ The Commission responded, among other things, that some of the statutory arguments that these BOCs advanced before the court had not been clearly presented to the Commission, and thus that the Commission should have an opportunity, prior to judicial review, to reconsider on an expedited basis its interpretation in light of these arguments.³⁶ On March 31, 1997, the court granted the Commission's request, and noted its expectation that the Commission would complete its reconsideration within 90 days (which is the timeframe the Commission had suggested).³⁷ On April 3, 1997, the Common Carrier Bureau issued a Public Notice seeking comment on certain specific questions relating to

³² 47 U.S.C. § 272(e)(4).

³³ See *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, para. 260 (describing commenters' positions). By "wholesale" interLATA services in this context, we mean, and the parties generally mean, interLATA services that are provided to other telecommunications carriers, not to end users.

³⁴ See *id.* paras. 261-262.

³⁵ See *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, No. 97-1067, Motion of Bell Atlantic and Pacific Telesis for Summary Reversal or for Expedition (D.C. Cir. filed Feb. 11, 1997).

³⁶ See *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, No. 97-1067, Motion of Federal Communications Commission For Remand to Consider Issues (D.C. Cir. filed Feb. 25, 1997).

³⁷ See *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, No. 97-1067, Order (D.C. Cir. Mar. 31, 1997) (citation omitted).

section 272(e)(4).³⁸ The pleading cycle closed on April 24, 1997.

15. Bell Atlantic, NYNEX, SBC (which, after the merger, includes PacTel), and BellSouth (hereinafter "the BOCs") filed joint comments and reply comments that largely track the arguments made by Bell Atlantic and PacTel in their pleadings before the Court of Appeals.³⁹ The BOCs focus principally on what they regard as the plain language of section 272(e)(4). As noted above, section 272(e)(4) states in relevant part that a BOC "may provide any interLATA . . . services to its interLATA affiliate if such services . . . are made available to all carriers . . . on the same [rates,] terms and conditions, and so long as the costs are appropriately allocated." In the BOCs' view, the phrase "may provide" is the language of a grant of authority. They also emphasize that what Congress decided the BOCs "may provide" is not just some interLATA services, but "any" such services.

16. The BOCs do recognize certain limits on this purported grant of authority. First, the BOCs effectively recognize that the grant of authority is limited to wholesale interLATA services,⁴⁰ presumably because the only entities to which section 272(e)(4) contemplates the BOC providing interLATA services are "its interLATA affiliate" and "all carriers" -- not end-users -- and because reading section 272(e)(4) as a grant of authority to provide *retail* interLATA services would render section 272's separate affiliate requirement for interLATA services utterly meaningless. They also recognize that any grant of authority in section 272(e)(4) is conditioned on the satisfaction of the non-discrimination and cost-allocation requirements plainly set forth in that provision.⁴¹ Lastly, given that section 271(b) requires section 271(d)(3) approval before a BOC may provide in-region "interLATA services," a phrase that the BOCs agree includes wholesale as well as retail services, the BOCs concede that the section 271(d)(3) approval requirement must still be met before they may provide wholesale interLATA services to their affiliates and other carriers pursuant to section 272(e)(4).⁴² Nonetheless, in the BOCs' view, the "may provide" language in section 272(e)(4) compels the conclusion that that section is fundamentally a grant of authority to the BOCs to directly offer in-region interLATA services, whatever the limits on that grant.

17. To bolster their plain language argument, the BOCs further contend that reading

³⁸ See *Comments Requested in Connection With Expedited Reconsideration of Interpretation of Section 272(e)(4)*, Public Notice, CC Docket No. 96-149, 12 FCC Rcd 3777 (1997).

³⁹ US WEST and Omnipoint filed separate comments offering variants on the BOCs' position. US WEST also filed reply comments. Both parties' comments are addressed below.

⁴⁰ See BOCs Reply at 3 (arguing that separate affiliate requirement for interLATA services applies only to "service provided to end-users").

⁴¹ See BOCs at 1.

⁴² See *id.* at 8-9 & n.7; BOCs Reply at 2.

section 272(e)(4) as a grant of authority benefits long-distance consumers.⁴³ The BOCs generally claim that, if permitted by the statute, they intend to design, build, and operate new facilities-based interLATA networks, as well as maintain existing ones such as their Official Services Networks.⁴⁴ After they receive section 271(d)(3) approval to provide in-region interLATA services, the BOCs assert that they would use the authority granted by section 272(e)(4) to sell interLATA services that can be provided over these networks, on a wholesale basis, to their affiliates (as well as other carriers).⁴⁵ The BOCs argue that placing the design, construction, and operation of their interLATA networks in the local operating companies in this way benefits long-distance consumers because the BOCs are able to achieve considerable efficiencies that in turn lead to lower long-distance rates. A Bell Atlantic affidavit submitted by the BOCs explains the source of these potential efficiencies:

Bell Atlantic intends to place the construction, ownership and operation of its long-distance network in its operating telephone companies. . . . [T]he reason is simple. The telephone companies currently provide local exchange, exchange access, and short-haul (or 'intraLATA') long distance service. As a result, they already own some facilities, equipment and related support systems that can be used to provide both local and long-distance service. They also employ a skilled workforce that is trained in the construction, operation, installation and maintenance of telephone facilities and equipment; and that is capable of managing local and long distance facilities alike. Placing the construction and operation of long distance facilities (whether new or existing) in the operating telephone companies will allow us to make the most efficient use of these existing resources.⁴⁶

18. Ten parties, including the largest interexchange carriers, a trade association representing long-distance resellers, and two state commissions, filed comments and/or reply comments opposing the view that section 272(e)(4) is an affirmative grant of authority.⁴⁷

⁴³ See BOCs at 10-13.

⁴⁴ The Official Services Networks are interLATA networks that the BOCs were allowed to maintain under the MFJ for internal use. See *United States v. Western Electric*, 569 F.Supp. 1057, 1097-1101 (D.D.C.), *aff'd*, 464 U.S. 1013 (1983).

⁴⁵ There is no dispute that, once the separate affiliate requirement sunsets, the operating companies can own and operate facilities-based interLATA networks, and they can sell the services provided over those networks to whomever they want. There is also no dispute that the operating companies may continue to use their Official Services Networks for internal purposes.

⁴⁶ BOCs at tab 2, page 2 (Declaration of James G. Cullen, Vice Chairman of Bell Atlantic Corporation).

⁴⁷ AT&T, MCI, Sprint, WorldCom, Frontier, the Telecommunications Resellers Association, the Competitive Telecommunications Association, TCG, and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio filed comments. AT&T, MCI, Sprint, and Worldcom also filed reply comments. The State of California and the California Public Utilities Commission filed (joint) reply comments only.

These parties focus primarily on what they regard as the plain language of 272(a) and the flat prohibition they say it contains on direct BOC provision of all but a small, clearly specified subset of in-region interLATA services (*e.g.*, five of the six incidental services) prior to the sunset of the separate affiliate requirement. Specifically, they focus on the phrases "interLATA telecommunications services" and "interLATA information services" in section 272(a)(2) and argue that both phrases plainly apply to wholesale as well as retail services -- just as the more general phrase "interLATA services" in section 271 applies to both. Parties opposing the BOCs also focus on the clearly specified subset of interLATA services that are exempted from the separate affiliate requirement in section 272(a) -- "out-of-region" services, "incidental" services, "previously authorized" services, "electronic publishing," and "alarm monitoring" -- and observe that "wholesale" services are not among them. They find it significant as well that the MFJ, which the section 271/272 framework replaces in relevant part, imposed an outright bar on BOC provision of interLATA services and in so doing, did not distinguish between retail and wholesale services. In light of the flat prohibition in section 272(a), the opponents of the BOCs conclude, the only sensible way to read section 272(e)(4) is solely as a nondiscrimination and cost-allocation requirement that limits the manner in which BOCs may provide interLATA services that they are otherwise authorized to provide, such as the interLATA services that fall into the subset of exceptions in section 272(a) and, when the separate affiliate requirements sunset, other interLATA services as well.

19. The opponents of the BOCs also dispute the claim that reading section 272(e)(4) as a grant of authority benefits consumers. Most broadly, they assert that the BOCs' vision of an "'integrated supplier' of local and long-distance services . . . is wholly disengaged from . . . [and] at war with" the separate affiliate requirement in section 272.⁴⁸ Section 272, they explain, was Congress' response to the traditional concerns for discrimination and improper cost allocation that arise precisely when a dominant carrier providing local exchange and exchange access services seeks to provide long-distance service on a physically integrated basis. More specifically, they emphasize that section 272 reflects Congress' fundamental decision to impose a *structural*, as opposed to a non-structural, solution in response to these concerns in the short-term.

20. Lastly, the opponents of the BOCs argue that, in a world in which section 272(e)(4) is a grant of authority, it would be extremely difficult to enforce the non-discrimination requirement. The Telecommunications Resellers Association (TRA), for example, complains that non-facilities-based interLATA resellers, who are the would-be rivals of the BOCs' interLATA affiliates, "know all too well from their experience . . . that even the slightest preference or discrimination can be highly consequential in a fast-paced competitive market."⁴⁹ Moreover, according to TRA, "[g]iven the comprehensive interaction between a non-facilities-based resale carrier and its network service provider, the opportunities for

⁴⁸ AT&T Reply at 4.

⁴⁹ Telecommunications Resellers Association at 8.

preference or discrimination abound."⁵⁰ TRA explains that resellers need equal treatment not only with respect to the general rates, terms, and conditions of service but also with respect to "myriad operational support systems such as order provisioning, trouble resolution and billing."⁵¹ Along similar lines, facilities-based interLATA service providers such as AT&T and MCI complain that the BOCs will be able to "customize" the networks they build and the services they provide to be responsive to the needs of their interLATA affiliates.⁵² The principal point of such arguments appears to be that the difficulty of enforcing the non-discrimination requirement if we were to conclude that section 272(e)(4) is a grant of authority is one more reason to question whether Congress intended section 272(e)(4) to be such a grant of authority.

21. In response, the BOCs claim that any conflict between section 272(a) and section 272(e)(4) is "wholly imaginary" because section 272(a) merely establishes "a general rule" providing that the BOCs must provide certain services "through" an affiliate.⁵³ The subsections that follow 272(a) then "detail the conduct that Congress understood to be consistent with the general rule."⁵⁴ Section 272(e)(4), they say, is one such provision. The BOCs claim the conflict is wholly imaginary also because one of the principal activities for which section 272(a) requires a separate affiliate is the "[o]rigination of interLATA telecommunications services," and, in the BOCs' view, the term "origination" describes a *retail* interLATA service. They argue that, "[w]hen a BOC provides interLATA services to its affiliate under [section 272(e)(4)] . . . , it is not 'originating' interLATA services. Rather, it is the affiliate that 'originates' such services when its retail customers place interLATA calls."⁵⁵

22. Alternatively, the BOCs claim that, even assuming there were a conflict between section 272(a) and section 272(e)(4), "[u]nder well-established canons of statutory interpretation, the specific authorization contained in section 272(e)(4) would take precedence over the general language of section 272(a)."⁵⁶

23. In response to the argument that the BOCs' notion of an integrated supplier is "at war with" section 272, the BOCs contend that the separate affiliate requirement in section 272

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² AT&T at 1, 8; MCI at 8, 11.

⁵³ BOCs at 4.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 5.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 6 (footnote omitted) (citing cases).

was not designed to prevent a BOC from providing interLATA service on a physically integrated basis; rather it was designed "to make entirely transparent the dealings between an operating company and its interLATA affiliate."⁵⁷ As for the traditional concerns about discrimination and improper cost allocation that arise where a BOC provides integrated service, the BOCs contend that any such concerns that Congress may have had in enacting section 272 exist only where the BOC has incentives to engage in discrimination and cost shifting. According to the BOCs, the wholesale provision of interLATA services pursuant to section 272(e)(4) does not create such incentives because of the requirement that any wholesale interLATA services the BOC provides to its affiliate must be made available to any other carrier on the same rates, terms, and conditions. The BOCs assert that this requirement effectively eliminates any incentives to engage in discrimination or improper cost allocation because, according to the BOCs, any advantage the BOC would gain from engaging in such conduct could not be captured by the affiliate alone. Rather, the advantages would necessarily be offered to all carriers.

IV. DISCUSSION

24. As an initial matter, we agree with the BOCs to this extent: the phrase "may provide" in section 272(e)(4), *if viewed in isolation*, could reasonably be read as a grant of authority. Thus, standing alone without reference to any other statutory provision, section 272(e)(4) could reasonably be read to allow a BOC to provide directly any interLATA services, including in-region services, to its affiliate so long as it does so in conformity with the non-discrimination and cost allocation requirements in that provision.

25. But section 272(e)(4) cannot be viewed in isolation; it must be read in conjunction with other provisions to which it is integrally related. And a thorough analysis of sections 271 and 272 confirms our view that section 272(e)(4) is not an independent grant of authority for the BOCs to provide wholesale interLATA services on an unseparated basis. We conclude first that section 272(a), in relevant part, *prohibits* the BOCs from doing precisely what the BOCs claim section 272(e)(4) authorizes them to do. Specifically, section 272(a) prohibits the BOCs, after obtaining section 271(d)(3) approval and until sunset of section 272's requirements, from providing directly most in-region interLATA services, including wholesale services, except through a separate affiliate. We thus confront an apparent conflict between section 272(a) and section 272(e)(4). In so doing, we further conclude that the only plausible construction of either provision that reconciles the apparent conflict and serves the core purposes for which Congress imposed a separate affiliate requirement is a construction of section 272(e)(4) according to which it is a non-discrimination requirement -- a requirement that is similar in function, not surprisingly, to the non-discrimination requirements that appear in sections 271(e)(1), 271(e)(2), and 272(e)(3). The BOCs' reading of section 272(e)(4), by contrast, fails to serve such purposes and further, requires us to believe that Congress intended to tuck away a fundamental grant of authority in

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 9.

section 272(e). In these respects and others, our analysis indicates that the interpretation proffered by the BOCs is unpersuasive.

26. We find unconvincing the reasons advanced by the BOCs in support of their claim that the separate affiliate requirement in section 272(a) can reasonably be read to refer only to retail services. As summarized above, the BOCs first seek to justify this reading of the statute on the ground that section 272(a) establishes a "general" rule and that that general rule is necessarily read to refer only to retail services because that is the reading that makes the general rule consistent with the apparent grant of authority in section 272(e)(4) to provide wholesale services. There is nothing "general," however, about the separate affiliate requirement in section 272(a) with respect to the interLATA services that are covered by that requirement. In particular, section 272(a)(1) states that a BOC may not provide "any service *described in [section 272(a)(2)]*" unless it provides "*that service*" through an affiliate.⁵⁸ Section 272(a)(2) then specifies precisely "[t]he services for which a separate affiliate is required," namely, manufacturing activities, the origination of interLATA telecommunications services (with three exceptions), and interLATA information services (with two exceptions).⁵⁹ Thus, the scope of section 272(a)'s separate affiliate requirement appears plainly to be fleshed out by section 272(a)(2), not by *subsequent* provisions in section 272 such as section 272(e)(4).

27. This last point also serves as a complete response to the BOCs' persistent emphasis on the word "through" in section 272(a)(1). In the BOCs' view, section 272(a)(1) does not categorically prohibit a BOC from providing directly the services listed in section 272(a)(2); rather, section 272(a)(1) says that the BOC may not provide such services unless "it," the BOC, provides such services "through" an affiliate. And, in the BOCs' view, "one of the most natural ways" for a BOC to provide such services "through" an affiliate is to provide them *to* an affiliate, on a wholesale basis, and then to have the affiliate resell the services on a retail basis.⁶⁰ As an initial matter and as explained in more detail below, in the context of past separate affiliate requirements that have been imposed on the BOCs for the provision of competitive services that require local BOC facilities as an input, there is nothing "natural" about the BOCs' proposed wholesale/retail framework, which would allow the BOCs to provide interLATA services on a fully integrated basis. Such requirements, where a court or agency has chosen to impose them, have never allowed such integration of local BOC facilities and the extra facilities necessary to provide the competitive service at issue. In any event, whether "natural" or not, providing integrated interLATA services "through" a BOC affiliate by providing such services *to* the affiliate cannot be squared with the language of section 272(a)(2). As demonstrated above, section 272(a)(2) includes the exclusive list of services that a BOC must provide "through" an affiliate. That list includes "interLATA

⁵⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 272(a)(1) (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ *Id.* § 272(a)(2).

⁶⁰ BOCs at 5.

telecommunications services" and "interLATA information services," which -- as demonstrated immediately below -- plainly include wholesale as well as retail services.⁶¹ Thus, it is clear that section 272(a) requires the BOCs to provide wholesale interLATA services "through" an affiliate, just as it requires them to provide retail interLATA services "through" an affiliate.

28. The BOCs' other basis for reading section 272(a) to refer only to retail services rests on the use of the term "[o]rigination" in the phrase "[o]rigination of interLATA telecommunications services" in section 272(a)(2). As explained above, the BOCs assert that, "[w]hen a BOC provides interLATA services to its affiliate under [section 272(e)(4)], . . . it is not 'originating' interLATA services. . . . [I]t is the affiliate that 'originates' such services when its retail customers place interLATA calls."⁶² Significantly, however, the BOCs do not offer any dictionary definition of "origination," nor a definition drawn from any other authoritative source, that supports their particular understanding of the term.⁶³ Rather, they argue that the term "origination" derives its meaning from the context of section 272.⁶⁴ Although we agree that the term must be understood in its proper context,⁶⁵ the difficulty with

⁶¹ We recognize that the BOCs might argue here that the term "origination" in section 272(a) indicates just such a distinction. We note first, however, that such an argument would undercut the BOCs' suggestion in their comments that their argument based on the term "through" in section 272(a)(1) is independent of their argument based on the term "origination." See BOCs at 4-5. In any event, again as explained immediately below, we find the BOCs' "origination" argument unpersuasive.

⁶² See also BOCs at 5 n.3 ("'origination' refers to the specific activity of providing interLATA services to the customers who initiate interLATA calls").

⁶³ Such sources might include the meaning of the term elsewhere in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the meaning of the term under traditional common carrier regulation, or under the MFJ, or the meaning of the term in a technical engineering sense.

⁶⁴ See BOCs Reply at 3-4 ("[W]e believe that our view of 'origination' is the only sensible one in the context of section 272.").

⁶⁵ Context is particularly important here because an overly literal reading of section 272(a)(2) leads to nonsensical results. As described above, section 272(a)(2) requires, in relevant part, a separate affiliate for a service called "origination of interLATA telecommunications services." At least with respect to bundled, end-to-end interLATA telecommunications services, however, such "origination" service could be understood to be the service commonly known as originating exchange access service or originating access. See WorldCom at 8 (citing "exchange access" as an example of an "origination" service as understood "in the telecommunications industry"). And originating access (and terminating access, for that matter) is one of the BOCs' core local services and has long been provided by the BOCs directly, subject to regulation of course. Indeed, it is nearly a meaningless idea to speak of such service as having to be provided through a separate affiliate, which explains why no party denies that the BOCs themselves may provide both originating and terminating access for interLATA calls. In a footnote to its separate comments, US WEST seems to adhere to this literal view of "origination," but for the reasons just stated, we reject that view. See US WEST at 5 n.10 ("The appearance of ['origination'] in Section 272(a)(2)(B) was probably intended merely to distinguish the service for which a separate affiliate is required -- the origination of an interLATA call -- from the service a BOC may provide directly -- the termination of an interLATA call"). It is significant,

the BOCs' position is that they simply *assert*, without explanation, that the proper context is "the specific activity of providing interLATA services to . . . customers," *i.e.*, providing retail interLATA services. In contrast, sections 271 and 272 indicate that Congress was almost certainly using the term "origination" in section 272(a)(2) in a geographical sense.

29. Specifically, it is far more likely that, by requiring a separate affiliate for "[o]rigination of interLATA telecommunications services," Congress simply meant to clarify that a separate affiliate is required for certain interLATA telecommunications services *as judged by the point of origination of such services*. Such a clarification might have been considered helpful in light of the fact that, as noted above, one of the exceptions to the separate affiliate requirement for "[o]rigination of interLATA telecommunications services" is for "out-of-region" services, that is, services for which the point of origination is outside a BOC's in-region states. This out-of-region versus in-region distinction is one of the fundamental distinctions in section 271; section 271 permits immediate entry for the former, but requires section 272(d)(3) approval for the latter.⁶⁶ It is therefore only natural that Congress would have wanted to maintain -- and did maintain -- that same distinction in the separate affiliate requirement in section 272. Further, this view of "origination" in section 272(a)(2) appears to be consistent with the *absence* of that term with respect to "interLATA information services." Because Congress failed to include an "out-of-region" services exception with respect to interLATA information services, a separate affiliate is required for such services regardless of their point of origination.⁶⁷

30. The legislative history supports our view that the term "origination" was meant merely as a helpful clarification. It appears that the term "origination" was not part of either the Senate or the House version of section 272(a), but was added during the reconciliation conference. For example, the Senate version of section 272(a), which was the template for the final version, stated, "The services for which a separate subsidiary is required . . . are: (A) Information services . . . (B) Manufacturing services . . . (C) InterLATA services"⁶⁸

nonetheless, that US WEST does not adhere to the other BOCs' view of "origination" as indicating a wholesale/retail distinction.

⁶⁶ See also 47 U.S.C. § 271(b)(3) (authorizing immediate provision of "incidental interLATA services . . . originating in any State") (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ See *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, paras. 85-87 (finding that this result is compelled by the language of the statute). We note that several parties have challenged this finding in petitions for reconsideration of the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*. See US WEST Petition at 1-5 (filed Feb. 20, 1997); BellSouth Petition at 10-13 (filed Feb. 20, 1997). We note in addition that the term "origination" does not qualify the phrase "interLATA telecommunications services" as that phrase appears in the 272(f) sunset provision, which (for obvious reasons) also does not make any express reference to an out-of-region versus in-region distinction.

⁶⁸ S. 652, §252(b), 104th Cong., 1st Sess. 28 (1995); see also H.R. 1555, §246(a), 104th Cong., 1st Sess. 10 (1995) (imposing separate affiliate requirement on the provision of "any interLATA telecommunications or interLATA information service").

Thus, both houses of Congress passed versions of section 272(a) in which the separate affiliate requirement, even the BOCs would have to agree, clearly applied to both retail and wholesale interLATA services. The explanation in the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Senate version of section 272 confirms this. It describes the services for which a separate affiliate is required as including "interLATA telecommunications services," without the term "origination" preceding it and without any indication of a wholesale/retail distinction.⁶⁹ Thus, to accept the BOCs' argument, one would have to conclude that the addition of the term "origination" during the conference reflected Congress' decision to reject the broad consensus that had been reached on the scope of the separate affiliate requirement and to cut back on it significantly by limiting the requirement to retail service offerings that originate within the BOC's service territory. If this were the case, one would expect, at a minimum, some discussion of such a decision in the legislative history, but we have found no such discussion, and the parties have not pointed to any. The Joint Explanatory Statement, for example, is silent on the issue. Rather, the explanation in the Joint Explanatory Statement of the final version of section 272 simply states, "The conference agreement adopts the Senate provisions with several modifications," and then goes on to discuss the major changes that occurred, without mentioning the addition of "origination."⁷⁰

31. Moreover, equating the "origination" of a service with the retail provision of that service appears to lead to unlikely results in two respects. First, as just noted, the term "origination" does not precede the other main category of interLATA service for which a separate affiliate is required, namely, interLATA information services. Under the BOCs' reading of the statute, then, in-region wholesale interLATA information services would still generally require a separate affiliate, while in-region wholesale interLATA telecommunications services would not. Yet Congress treated these two kinds of in-region interLATA services identically for section 271 purposes, requiring section 271(d)(3) approval for both. The BOCs have not advanced any plausible rationale for why Congress would have treated them fundamentally differently for section 272 purposes.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Joint Explanatory Statement at 150. Likewise, the description of the House version identifies the covered services as including "BOC provision of interLATA telecommunications or information services," again without the term "origination" modifying that description. *Id.* at 151.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 152. We also note that the general introduction to the Joint Explanatory Statement explains that any changes adopted during the conference are "noted below" in the body of the Joint Explanatory Statement, "except for clerical corrections, conforming changes made necessary by agreements reached by the conferees, and minor drafting and clerical changes." *Id.* at 113. Presumably, then, by not even mentioning the addition of "origination," Congress viewed this addition as one of these minor kinds of changes.

⁷¹ We recognize that the BOCs might argue here that their alternative argument for why there is no conflict between section 272(a) and 272(e)(4) -- their argument based on the term "through" in section 272(a)(1) -- still applies to interLATA information services and thus that they are, in fact, allowed to provide wholesale interLATA information services to their affiliates. While we do not agree, as explained above, that the BOCs' "through" argument is a persuasive one, we do agree that if it were persuasive, it would apply equally to both interLATA telecommunications services and interLATA information services. Nonetheless, such an argument would be

32. Second, equating the "origination" of a service with the retail provision of that service also appears to lead to unlikely results because of the interplay between sections 271(a) and 271(b). Section 271(a) bars BOC provision of "interLATA services" -- which, as noted above, the BOCs agree include wholesale services -- "except as provided in this section." Section 271(b) then authorizes, on various timetables, "interLATA services originating in any of [a BOC's] in-region States," "interLATA services originating outside its in-region States," and certain "incidental interLATA services . . . originating in any State." If the term "origination" in section 272(a)(2) refers only to the provision of retail interLATA services, then the references to "originating" in section 271(b) would also appear to refer to retail interLATA services. Consequently, under the BOCs' reading of the statute, section 271(a) bars a BOC from providing wholesale interLATA services, but no provision of section 271(b) authorizes the BOCs to provide these services, including out-of-region and incidental wholesale services.⁷² Thus, we conclude that a carrier "originat[es]" an in-region interLATA service in a particular state when it provides in-region interLATA service regardless of whether it provides that service on a wholesale or a retail basis.

33. We note that, during the proceeding that resulted in the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, certain of the BOCs advanced a different argument as to why the language of section 272(a) does not cover wholesale services: that the phrase "telecommunications services" itself -- statutorily defined as "the offering of telecommunications for a fee directly to the public, . . . regardless of the facilities used"⁷³ -- covers only retail services.⁷⁴ Proponents of this interpretation contended that wholesale telecommunication services are not offered directly to "the public," but only to other carriers. In the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, the Commission addressed this argument at length and rejected it primarily on the ground that it could find no basis in the statute, legislative history, or FCC precedent for finding the reference to "the public" in the

tantamount to a concession that the term "origination" in section 272(a)(2), under the BOCs' reading of that term, is at most a clarification of the wholesale/retail distinction that section 272(a)(1) purportedly establishes. Such a concession weighs against the BOCs' reading of that term because it is hard to think of a reason why Congress would have wanted to clarify this distinction with respect only to interLATA telecommunications services but not with respect to interLATA information services.

⁷² It might be argued that, under the BOCs' reading, section 272(e)(4) itself provides the requisite authorization. But the point here is not that the BOCs would never, in fact, be authorized to provide wholesale interLATA services, but rather that it is unlikely that Congress intended section 271(b) to have such a gaping hole in it. After all, section 271(b) is the principal authority-granting provision in the section 271/272 framework. In this regard, it is telling that, in addressing the argument that their reading of "origination" leads to unlikely results, the BOCs do not argue that section 272(e)(4) provides the requisite authorization. They focus instead on distinguishing the use of the term "originating" in section 271(b) from the use of the term "origination" in section 272(a)(2). See BOCs Reply at 3 n.3.

⁷³ 47 U.S.C. § 153(46).

⁷⁴ See *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, para. 260 (noting that PacTel took this position).

statutory definition to be intended to exclude wholesale telecommunications services. Rather, the Commission concluded that the phrase "the public" was meant only to exclude private carriage services, as opposed to common carrier services.⁷⁵ While the BOCs have not pressed this particular argument before the court or before the Commission on reconsideration, Omnipoint has pressed a variant of it in response to the Bureau's request for comments on the scope of section 272(e)(4).

34. In providing wireless service, Omnipoint explains that it often needs transport services that cross LATA boundaries and that it could deliver a more efficient wireless service if it could use the BOCs' interLATA transport facilities, such as the existing transport facilities that are part of the BOCs' Official Services Networks, rather than build its own interLATA transport facilities or lease the interLATA transport facilities of existing interLATA service providers (facilities which Omnipoint says are inconveniently located for its purposes).⁷⁶ Its principal legal argument is that our conclusion in the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order* that the phrase "telecommunications services" covers all wholesale (as well as retail) telecommunication services was "overly broad"⁷⁷ and that it should be construed to exclude at least one kind of wholesale arrangement, carrier-to-carrier leasing of high-capacity private lines. We find no basis in the statutory definition of "telecommunications services," however, for concluding that this kind of wholesale arrangement, as opposed to all other kinds, falls outside that definition.⁷⁸

35. US WEST, like the other BOCs, does not dispute that the statutory definition of "telecommunications services" applies to wholesale telecommunications services. It merely observes that the statutory definition does not cover *all* telecommunications-like services -- most significantly, it does not include private carriage services -- and that the BOCs should be able to provide directly any service that falls outside that definition.⁷⁹ With the important reminders that (1) wholesale telecommunications services are one kind of telecommunications-like services that, as just noted, does *not* fall outside that definition, and (2) the separate affiliate requirement also applies to in-region interLATA information services, we have no objection to this observation. In this regard, however, we note our serious doubts

⁷⁵ See *id.* paras. 263-265.

⁷⁶ See Omnipoint at 3-6.

⁷⁷ *Id.* at 7.

⁷⁸ More broadly, Omnipoint also suggests that such wholesale private-line leasing arrangements should not be understood as the provisioning of services, but rather solely as the provisioning of facilities, in which case such arrangements fall entirely outside the section 271/272 framework governing the provisioning of interLATA services. As explained below, however, such arrangements are plainly services. See *infra* note 110 and accompanying text.

⁷⁹ See US WEST at 4 ("'[I]nterLATA service' plainly has a broader scope than does 'interLATA telecommunications service,' and the difference between the two represents the interLATA services that a BOC may provide directly.").

whether there is any interLATA service that a BOC might seek to provide to its affiliate that could be properly characterized as a private carriage service, given that the BOC would be under a legal obligation pursuant to sections 272(c)(1) and 272(e)(4) to make such service available to any other entity -- a hallmark of a common carrier service.⁸⁰

36. Firmly bolstering our view that nothing in section 272(a)(2) suggests a wholesale/retail distinction -- not "origination," not "telecommunication services," and not any other term or phrase -- is the fact that section 251(c)(4) demonstrates that, when Congress means to create an important wholesale/retail distinction, it does so clearly, a point we emphasized in the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*.⁸¹ Section 251(c)(4) imposes a duty on incumbent local exchange carriers to offer for resale at wholesale rates "any telecommunications service that the carrier provides at retail to subscribers who are not telecommunications carriers."⁸² Moreover, section 272(a)(2) sets out quite specifically the three kinds of services for which a separate affiliate is required and the exceptions to each kind of service. Congress' attention to detail in this respect makes the lack of any straightforward textual indication of a wholesale/retail distinction in section 272 all the more telling. In sum, we reject the BOCs' assertion that section 272(a) prohibits a BOC from offering directly to customers only retail interLATA services originating in-region.

37. We think that section 272(b)(1), which requires the separate affiliate to "operate independently" of the BOC, provides independent support for the fact that Congress did not intend the BOCs to provide in-region interLATA services, on a wholesale basis, to their affiliates and other carriers. To allow the BOCs to provide such services would be to allow them to place the design, construction, and operation of their interLATA facilities in their local operating companies and thus to provide their wholesale in-region interLATA services over a uniquely integrated local-interLATA network. As explained above, however, we concluded in the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order* that section 272(b)(1) was principally designed to prevent substantial integration of the local operating company's local network facilities and the separate affiliate's long-distance network facilities (assuming the affiliate chooses to be a facilities-based provider rather than a reseller). And such a conclusion plainly presupposes that Congress did not intend that local and interLATA facilities could be integrated within the local operating company itself. For what purpose could Congress have had in prohibiting physical integration of the local operating company's local facilities and the affiliate's interLATA facilities if complete physical integration of local and interLATA networks within the local operating company itself would be permitted regardless?

⁸⁰ See, e.g., *National Ass'n of Regulatory Utility Comm'rs v. FCC*, 525 F.2d 630, 641, cert. denied, 425 U.S. 992 (1976) (NARUC I); *National Ass'n of Regulatory Utility Comm'rs v. FCC*, 533 F.2d. 601, 608 (1976) (NARUC II).

⁸¹ See *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, para. 264.

⁸² 47 U.S.C. § 251(c)(4).

38. Having concluded that section 272(a), reinforced by section 272(b)(1), prohibits in relevant part precisely what the BOCs claim section 272(e)(4) authorizes, we now address the BOCs' alternative arguments regarding the proper interpretation of section 272(e)(4). As summarized above, the BOCs contend that, even assuming *arguendo* we were to find an apparent conflict between sections 272(a) and 272(e)(4), under the well-established canon of construction, the more specific provision overrides the more general provision. Even assuming *arguendo* that this canon were applicable, however, it is far from clear that section 272(e)(4) should be considered the more specific provision and section 272(a) the more general. While there are certain respects in which section 272(e)(4) is the more specific provision, there are also certain respects in which section 272(e)(4) is the more general. For example, one could reasonably view section 272(e)(4) as the more general provision because that section, under the BOCs' reading of it, constitutes a broad grant of authority to provide directly, on a wholesale basis, any interLATA services, any interLATA facilities, any intraLATA services, and any intraLATA facilities, whereas section 272(a) is a circumscribed limitation on that broad grant that requires that, out of the entire universe of interLATA or intraLATA facilities or services that a BOC is purportedly authorized to provide directly, certain such services -- specifically, manufacturing activities, interLATA telecommunications services (with three exceptions), and interLATA information services (with two exceptions) -- be provided through a separate affiliate.

39. It is also far from clear why, if we were to conclude that section 272(e)(4) overrides section 272(a), we would not have to conclude that it also overrides section 271(a), thus permitting the BOCs to provide any wholesale interLATA services immediately, before section 271(d)(3) approval -- a result, as mentioned above, the BOCs disavow. In this regard, the BOCs' attempt to distinguish section 271(a) and section 272(a) is unpersuasive. Specifically, they argue that section 271(a) does not give way to section 272(e)(4) because section 271(a) states that a BOC may not provide interLATA services "except as provided in this section," and section 272(e)(4) is not "in this section." Yet, as explained above, we think the text of section 272(a) directs equally clearly that the services for which a separate affiliate is required, along with any exceptions, are to be found in section 272(a)(2) and only that provision, not in subsequent provisions of section 272 such as section 272(e)(4).⁸³

40. In any event, we find that the canon the BOCs seek to invoke is not applicable in

⁸³ We recognize that, if we were to adopt an interpretation of section 272(e)(4) that does, in fact, override section 271(a) in addition to overriding section 272(a), the practical significance would arguably be minimal. This is because section 272(e)(4) speaks of a BOC's interLATA services being provided, in the first instance, to the BOC's "interLATA affiliate." And before section 271(d)(3) approval, the prospect of the BOC providing wholesale interLATA services to its "interLATA affiliate" would appear to be a harmless, if not meaningless, prospect, for the "interLATA affiliate" would not be able to provide those services on a retail basis until after section 271(d)(3) approval in any event. Nonetheless, it seems quite unlikely that Congress intended sections 271(a) and 271(b)(1), taken together, to permit the BOCs to provide in-region interLATA services of any kind before obtaining section 271(d)(3) approval, regardless of the practical significance of the BOCs doing so in particular situations -- a point that is reflected in the BOCs' own disavowal of such a result.

this instance, at least not in the way in which the BOCs have described it. The canon that "the specific governs the general" only applies where the conflict between the statutory provisions is inescapable, that is, where there is no *plausible* construction of either provision that allows the conflict to be reconciled.⁸⁴ This is for good reason, for the application of the canon where there is no such construction presupposes that Congress has contradicted itself -- a position that should be adopted only as a last resort. Thus, we are obliged to determine whether there is a plausible construction of either section 272(a) or 272(e)(4) that allows us to reconcile the apparent conflict, making sense of both provisions and serving the purposes of the statute to the greatest extent possible.

41. We are doubtful that there is any plausible construction of section 272(a) that would allow us to reconcile the apparent conflict and adopt the BOCs' reading of section 272(e)(4). As discussed at length above, the BOCs' characterization of section 272(a) as a "general" rule, to be given content by the subsequent subsections of section 272, cannot be sustained in light of that rule's clear directive to look specifically to the list of services in section 272(a)(2). Moreover, the BOCs' interpretation of "origination" as referring to the provision of interLATA services to retail customers who place interLATA calls does not appear to have any basis in the common usage of that term and appears to lead to unlikely results. The only other possible construction would be to add to the list of exceptions in section 272(a)(2) a "wholesale services" exception. While there may be situations where it is defensible to read an exception into a statute in order to reconcile an otherwise irreconcilable statutory conflict, that seems inappropriate where, as here, Congress explicitly focused on the issue of exceptions and prescribed a specific list. Buttressing this point is the fact that the Senate version of section 272 would have expressly authorized the Commission to grant exceptions to the separate affiliate requirement, but that provision was dropped by the conferees.⁸⁵

42. By contrast, we conclude that there is a plausible construction of section 272(e)(4) that reconciles the apparent conflict with section 272(a) and does so in a way that is uniquely consistent with the specific policy choice that Congress made in enacting the separate affiliate requirement. Specifically, as we previously concluded in the *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*,⁸⁶ we construe section 272(e)(4) to mean that the BOC may provide

⁸⁴ See *Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Hammond*, 726 F.2d 483, 490 n.8 (9th Cir. 1984) ("[P]rinciples of construction requiring the more recent and specific statute to prevail over the earlier and more general only apply when there is an irreconcilable conflict between statutes.") (citing *Watt v. Alaska*, 451 U.S. 259, 266 (1981) (making clear that the canon that the later controls the earlier applies only where the apparent statutory conflict is "irreconcilable")); see also 2A Norman J. Singer, *Sutherland Statutory Construction*, S. 46.05, at 105 (5th ed. 1992) ("Where there is *inescapable* conflict between general and specific terms or provisions of a statute, the specific will prevail.") (emphasis added).

⁸⁵ See Joint Explanatory Statement at 151-152.

⁸⁶ See *Non-Accounting Safeguards First Report and Order*, para. 261.

any interLATA or intraLATA facilities or services *it is otherwise authorized to provide* to its interLATA affiliate if such services or facilities are made available to all carriers at the same rates and on the same terms and conditions, and so long as the costs are appropriately allocated. Thus, in our view, section 272(e)(4) is not a grant of authority; it merely prescribes the manner by which BOCs may provide interLATA and intraLATA facilities and services to their affiliates.

43. We believe this construction of section 272(e)(4) does not have any of the defects alleged by the BOCs that might render the construction implausible. First, our reading gives effect to all of the statute's existing terms, including the key terms "may provide" and "any" on which the BOCs rely; our interpretation just does not read these terms as effectuating a grant of authority.

44. Second, our interpretation does not render section 272(e)(4) meaningless or redundant. Far from it, the provision serves precisely the same function as the other three provisions in section 272(e). As explained above, section 272(c)(1) imposes a general non-discrimination requirement on the BOCs in their dealings with affiliates. In order "to reduce litigation," however, Congress, in section 272(e), set forth more particularized non-discrimination requirements tailored to specific contexts.⁸⁷ Section 272(e)(1), for example, sets forth a non-discrimination requirement with respect to the time in which a BOC fulfills requests for local exchange or exchange access service. Similarly, section 272(e)(4) sets forth a non-discrimination requirement with respect to the provision of interLATA or intraLATA facilities and services that a BOC is otherwise authorized to provide -- services such as out-of-region services, five of the six incidental services, previously authorized activities, and perhaps most importantly, all other interLATA services as the separate affiliate requirements expire.

45. In light of the similar function that section 272(e)(4), under our reading, serves in relation to the other three provisions of section 272(e), our reading also draws support from the well-established canon of construction that statutory provisions are to be construed in light of the company they keep.⁸⁸ Our interpretation of section 272(e)(4) is also consistent with the overriding focus of section 272 generally. As both the text of section 272 and the

⁸⁷ See Joint Explanatory Statement at 150. As the BOCs themselves recognize in rebutting the claim that the phrase "intraLATA facilities and services" is a redundant one, it is not uncommon for Congress to want to include in a statute an "added dose of clarity." BOCs at 3.

⁸⁸ See *Jarecki v. G.D. Searle & Co.*, 367 U.S. 303, 307 (1961) ("[A] word is known by the company it keeps"); see also *Mass. v. Morash*, 490 U.S. 107, 115 (1989) (referring to this canon as the principle of *noscitur a sociis*, which literally means "it is known from its associates").

descriptions of the provision in the legislative history make clear,⁸⁹ section 272 primarily establishes structural separation requirements and other safeguards applicable to the BOCs' provision of interLATA and other services that the BOCs are elsewhere authorized to provide (in section 271, for the most part). In contrast, the BOCs' proposed reading of section 272(e)(4) as a grant of authority is flatly inconsistent with the thrust of section 272(e) in particular and section 272 in general. It seems unlikely enough that Congress would have placed a fundamental grant of authority to the BOCs in section 272, the thrust of which, as just noted, is to prescribe the manner in which the BOCs may enter certain new markets; but it seems utterly implausible that Congress would have placed such a grant in section 272(e) as the fourth subsection of a provision entitled "Fulfillment of Certain Requests," following three other subsections that all impose restrictions on the BOCs.

46. We recognize that our preferred interpretation of section 272(e)(4) does not give this provision the great significance the BOCs' interpretation does. We think this fact weighs in favor of our interpretation, however, because judging from the legislative history, Congress did not appear to regard section 272(e)(4) as a particularly significant provision, just as it did not appear to attach great significance to the addition of the term "origination" in section 272(a). Specifically, section 272(e)(4) was introduced as part of a lengthy managers' amendment to the Senate version of section 272.⁹⁰ Significantly, the amendment as a whole was described merely as "mak[ing] certain technical corrections."⁹¹ Moreover, at no point during the discussion of the managers' amendment was there any specific discussion of section 272(e)(4) or its impact. Nor does there appear to have been any such discussion of this provision at any later point in the legislative history. The absence of any discussion on the measure would seem highly unlikely, however, if section 272(e)(4) were really intended to be a fundamental grant of authority as the BOCs claim.⁹²

⁸⁹ The Joint Explanatory Statement, for example, refers to the Senate version of section 272 as being about "impos[ing] separate subsidiary and other safeguards on certain activities of the BOCs" and refers to the House version as being about "creat[ing] a separate subsidiary requirement for the BOC provision of interLATA telecommunications and information services." Joint Explanatory Statement at 150, 151. With respect to the final version of section 272, the Joint Explanatory Statement generally explains, "The conference agreement adopts the Senate provisions with several modifications." *Id.* at 152.

⁹⁰ See 141 Cong. Rec. S7926-01, S7928, 104th Cong. June 7, 1995 ("Pressler (and Hollings) Amendment No. 1258").

⁹¹ *Id.* S7942 (June 8, 1995).

⁹² In an *ex parte* presentation filed after the pleading cycle closed, see Letter and Memorandum from Mark L. Evans, Counsel for Bell Companies, to Mr. William F. Caton, Acting Secretary, Office of the Secretary (filed June 4, 1997), the BOCs submitted a provision of a bill reported by the Senate Commerce Committee that was the Senate predecessor to section 272 -- section 236(f) -- and that the BOCs say confirms that the Committee viewed section 272(e)(4) as a grant of authority. The particular section on which the BOCs rely is section 236(f)(3)(D), which was the predecessor to section 272(e)(4) in particular. Section 236(f)(3)(D) stated that the separate affiliate "shall be permitted to use interLATA facilities and services provided by its affiliated [BOC], so long as its costs are appropriately allocated and such facilities and services are provided to its subsidiaries and other carriers on

47. Finally, and most importantly, we think our interpretation is not only a plausible construction of the text, but also the only construction that can be squared with the considered policy choice Congress made in imposing a separate affiliate requirement for in-region interLATA services. For many years, until the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a well-known regulatory debate took place -- in the federal courts, in the Department of Justice, in the Commission, and among industry groups, antitrust law experts, and economists -- regarding the wisdom of allowing the BOCs, as regulated entities that control the bottleneck facilities of the local network, to provide services in potentially competitive markets that require these bottleneck facilities as an essential input of such services.⁹³ Examples of such services include interLATA services, which are provided by connecting a BOC's local bottleneck facilities to interLATA facilities, enhanced services, which are provided by connecting the BOC's local facilities to computer facilities,⁹⁴ and wireless

nondiscriminatory rates, terms, and conditions." S. 1822, 103d Cong., 2d Sess. §236(f)(3)(D) (1994); *see also Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*, S. Rep. No. 23, 104th Cong., 1st Sess. 10 (1995). As an initial matter, we note that section 236(f) was part of a bill that was reported by the Senate Commerce Committee of an entirely different (i.e., earlier) Congress than the Congress that passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996. We also note that the provision changed in what appear to be important respects when it was reintroduced in the subsequent Congress. For example, the "operate independently" requirement was added. *See* Letter from Frank Krogh, Counsel for MCI, to Mr. William F. Caton, Acting Secretary, Office of the Secretary (filed June 18, 1997). In any event, even if section 236(f)(3)(D) had passed as written, the same arguments advanced in this order against construing 272(e)(4) as a grant of authority would have applied against construing section 236(f)(3)(D) as a grant. Like section 272, section 236(f) contained an analog to section 272(a), namely section 236(f)(1). Section 236(f)(1) stated that "[o]ther than interLATA services authorized [by an MFJ court order], a [BOC] providing *interLATA services authorized under [section 236(c)]* shall provide *such interLATA services* in that market only through a subsidiary that is separate from an [BOC] entity that provides regulated local telephone exchange service." S. 1822, 103d Cong., 2d Sess. §236(f)(1) (1994) (*emphasis added*); *see also id.* §236(c) (authorizing, on various conditions, the BOCs to provide in-region "interLATA telecommunications services" and out-of-region "interLATA telecommunications services"). And like section 272(a), nothing in section 236(f)(1), or section 236(c) to which it refers, suggested an exception for *wholesale* interLATA telecommunications services. Thus, in the same way that there is an apparent conflict between sections 272(a) and 272(e)(4), there would have been an apparent conflict between sections 236(f)(1) and 236(f)(3)(D). And just as the only way to resolve the conflict between sections 272(a) and 272(e)(4) consistently with the policy choice Congress made to require a separate affiliate is to construe section 272(e)(4) not to be a grant of authority, the only way to resolve the conflict between sections 236(f)(1) and 236(f)(3)(D) would have been to construe 236(f)(3)(D) not to be a grant as well. In this regard, like section 272(e)(4), section 236(f)(3)(D) could have plausibly been construed not to be a grant of authority. That is, it could have plausibly been read to mean that the separate affiliate shall be permitted to use interLATA facilities and services provided by its affiliated BOC *where the BOC is otherwise authorized to provide such facilities and services*, so long as its costs are appropriately allocated and such facilities and services are provided to its subsidiaries and other carriers on nondiscriminatory rates, terms, and conditions.

⁹³ For an exhaustive account of this debate with respect to various such services, including the history of the MFJ and applicable FCC regulation, *see* Michael K. Kellog, et al., *Federal Telecommunications Law* (1992 & Supp. 1995). We note that the authors of this treatise represent the BOCs in this and other similar proceedings.

⁹⁴ "Enhanced" services, according to the Commission's rules, "refer to services, offered over common carrier transmission facilities used in interstate communications, which employ computer processing applications that act on format, content, code, protocol or similar aspects of the subscriber's transmitted information; provide the